

THE CONTRIBUTION OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN PROVIDING GRAMMAR REVIEW FOR NURSING ACADEMY STUDENTS¹

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ABSTRACT

English in Indonesian tertiary level is usually provided as specific English (for academic or occupational purposes). The method of grammar teaching in this context remains problematic. Grammar in tertiary level is used in a subordinate role; the primary focus is on functional language. Besides, presenting grammar in higher education is challenged by the students' interest.

Meanwhile, the fashionable Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been verified as a favorable approach for various language teaching contexts. TBLT is an offshoot of communicative approach that can balance 'focus on form' and 'focus on meaning'. Still, there has not been sufficient research that focuses on seeing the impact of TBLT to grammar instruction.

This study investigates the contribution of TBLT in providing grammar review for nursing academy students. The problem stated by Richards (2002) of whether learners develop acceptable levels of grammatical proficiency through task-based approach hopefully can get a clarification from this study. This study is expected to give pieces of consideration for curriculum developers and teachers.

This research which conducted at AKPER Kamanre Palopo applies a pre-experimental design. The data are collected using test, questionnaire, and observation. The result reveals that TBLT allows attention to grammar through focus on form at some of its stages and facilitates remedial grammar activity and can also develop the students' intrinsic motivation to review grammar.

Keywords: *Grammar Review, Nursing Academy Students, Task-Based Language Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

As grammar is evidently inseparable element of language teaching, the debate is no longer on whether it is important but rather on how to teach it. The question is deceptively easy since teaching grammar effectively is a complicated matter. The overwhelming consensus of how to teach grammar depends on the perceived students' need and the reason of grammar teaching (Ruuskanen, 1996: 455). In other words, the teaching of grammar should be adjusted to a particular language teaching context.

For Indonesian tertiary level, there are several English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts in which grammar should be involved. Normally, English in this level is a fundamental subject and provided in the first or second year. It can be in the form of general English or more specific one (for academic or occupational purposes). The method of grammar teaching in such contexts remains problematic. The significant of grammar is even still questionable.

In general, as stated by Nishiguchi (2003: 1), the aim of grammar instruction in higher level is to reinforce previously studied grammatical areas and to activate them through communicative activities. Grammar in tertiary level is used in a subordinate role; the primary

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focus is on functional language (Noonan, 2005: 1). That small portion makes grammar, again, is lagged behind and tends to be ignored in this level even if it is mentioned in the syllabus.

Besides, presenting grammar in higher education is challenged by the students' interest (Fitch, 1995: 57). The students have been attending English class for years with quite great emphasis on grammar. Many of them get bored and are not attracted in discussing or reviewing grammar point. College students usually think it is not necessary for them to pay attention to grammar anymore. Dannerbeck (2008: 414) states that college students would be more interested in practical language that has correlation with their study specification.

That seems to happen in AKPER Kamanre (a nursing academy in Palopo, South Sulawesi, Indonesia). English in this academy is offered as ESP (English for Specific Purpose). The students do enjoy the class because they learn English related to nursing. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to provide an effective grammar focus activity and arouse the students' attention to grammar in the class. Many of the students have poor grammatical competence. The English teachers of the academy have employed communicative task to overcome the problems and it works quite well.

Meanwhile, many researchers have already verified the fashionable Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as an approach that is favorable for various second language teaching contexts. The data from a range of Asia-Pacific region show that TBLT has emerged as the central concept of national language education policies and syllabuses (Nunan, 2005: 25). That is because of the eminences of TBLT. According to Ellis (2008: 36), it can capture the interest of the students that they will be more motivated to learn language.

Moreover, TBLT provides the learners with natural sources of meaningful material, ideal situation for communicative activity, and supportive feedback allowing for much greater opportunities for language use (Jeon, 2006: 202). Harmer (2009: 88) also states that TBLT can be very effective to provide language teaching and learning opportunities at intermediate levels or beyond. It means TBLT is effective to be applied in higher education level such as in university and academy.

TBLT is offered as an offshoot of communicative approach that can balance 'focus on form' and 'focus on meaning' (Ellis, 2008: 7). In fact, teachers often worry because TBLT seems to have no place for the teaching of grammar as revealed by Yousefi (2010: 4). It is reasonable to say that grammar teaching will not be pursued in TBLT. Still, there has not been sufficient research that focuses on seeing the impact of TBLT to grammar instruction and responses to such worries.

2. Problem Statement

Therefore, the writer chooses and applies TBLT as an alternative that is expected to meet the challenges of grammar instruction in tertiary level as identified above. Specifically, this study investigates the contribution of TBLT to improve the students' grammar competence and to stimulate the students' interest in reviewing grammar at AKPER Kamanre Palopo. The problem stated by Richards (2002: 153) of whether learners develop acceptable levels of grammatical proficiency through task-based approach hopefully can also find a clarification from this study.

3. Review of Literature

Nunan (2005: 25) as one of the TBLT advocates states that TBLT began to arouse attention in 1989 at the time his original volume of "Designing Tasks for Communicative Classroom" was published. That is as undeniable as the fact that the inspiration behind task-based approach is Prabhu's second language pedagogy work in Bangalore-India in 1986 (Oxford, 2008: 94). He developed the idea of getting learners to acquire English through tasks. He put forward many kinds of tasks and designed the learning contents into all kinds of communicative tasks.

While, Larsen-Freeman (2000: 144) describes TBLT in terms of its purpose as follows:

"Task-based approach aims to provide learners with a natural context for language use. As learners work to complete a task, they have abundant opportunity to interact. Such interaction is thought to facilitate language acquisition as learners have to work to understand each other and to express their own meaning. By so doing, they have to check to see if they have comprehended correctly and, at times, they have to seek clarification. By interacting with others, they get to listen to language which may be beyond their present ability, but with may be assimilated into their knowledge of the target language for use at a later time."

Willis (2006: 2) states that TBLT aims at richer interactions in class, focuses on meaning first and form later, and gets the learners feed-back. The same testimonial is given by Clandfield (2009: 1) as he describes that in TBLT learners begin by carrying out a communicative task, without specific focus on form. After they have done the task, they report and discuss how they accomplished this. Only at the end there is a specific focus on features of language form.

The depictions from those definitions above confirm that there is a slightly place for grammar in TBLT. It agrees with the decisive statement by Larsen-Freeman (2000: 149) that TBLT focuses on meaningful interaction while still drawing students' attention to language form as needed. This statement is a beneficial idea for this research.

Hitotuzi (2008: 236) adapts the framework by Willis into the following chart:

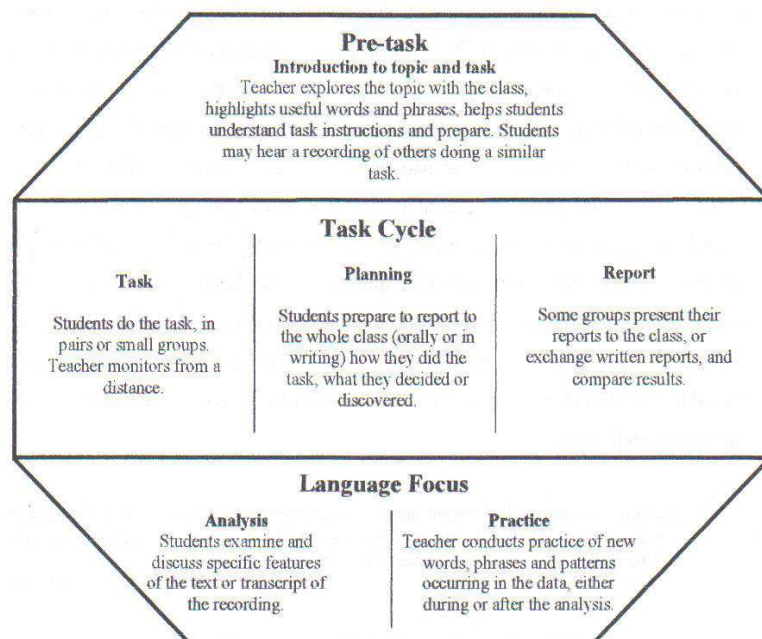


Figure 1. The Framework of Task-Based Language Teaching

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applies a pre-experimental design of one group-pre-test-post-test. There is one group under treatment without a control group. A pre-test was given before the experimental treatment while a post-test was given after the treatment. As well, the questionnaire was distributed twice, before and after the treatment.

The population of this research was the students of I A of AKPER Kamanre Palopo. They were the first semester students of the academy in which English is provided as a fundamental subject. The number of the population was 50 students. While, the number of the sample was 20 students selected randomly.

There were three kinds of instrument used for collecting data in this research namely test, questionnaire, and observation matrix. The grammar test consisted of 30 items of multiple choices. The test was given as pre-test to get the data of the students' prior

grammar competence before the treatment. The test was administered as post-test to get the data of the students' subsequent grammar competence or their achievement after the treatment.

There are two analogous versions of questionnaire distributed in this research. The first version of the questionnaire was administered to the students just before the treatment was carried out. It is used to obtain the data on the students' general interest to focus on grammar. Whereas, the second version of the questionnaire was distributed after the treatment done. It is used to get the data of students' interest in focusing grammar through Task-Based Language Teaching. The two versions of the questionnaire consist of ten (10) positive statements. Each statement has five options of Likert rating scale.

The observation aimed to get the overview of classroom activity and interaction related to grammar instruction through TBLT. The researcher did the observation by filling in the observation matrix in every meeting. The data from the observation were used as supporting data for the result of the test and questionnaire.

The technique of analyzing data is set orderly as: 1) Classifying the students' score of pre-test and post-test. The classification falls into five categories of Depdiknas (2008), 2) Finding the significant difference between pre-test and post-test by calculating the value of the *t*-test. The calculation was assisted by SPSS 15.00 software program, 3) Comparing the result of the first questionnaire and the second questionnaire, 4) Describing the result of the observation from the observation matrixes qualitatively.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. The Contribution of TBLT to Improve the Students' Grammar Competence

Based on the found and analyzed data, there is an improvement of students' grammar competence from the pre-test to the post-test after the application of TBLT. The data show that in pre-test most of the students have poor and fair grammar competences. The mean score of the pre-test is 40.46 and that falls into poor level. The data found from post-test reveal that most of the students have good grammar competence. The mean score of the post-test is 63.45 and classified into good level.

Then, the computation of the mean score of pre-test and post-test proves that there is a significant improvement from pre-test to post-test. The improvement is 22.99 in which *t*-observed value is higher than *t*-table value at 0.05 level of significance (see table 3). It means that students' grammar competence has improved after the students had TBLT. Therefore, the first hypothesis that TBLT improves the students' grammar competence is accepted.

As expected in the background of this study, this evidence can answer the question by Richards (2002: 153) of whether students develop acceptable levels of grammatical proficiency through TBLT. It is found in this study that the development of students' grammatical proficiency reaches two levels up from poor to good level. Also, the worry of the teacher that there is no place for grammar in TBLT (Yousefi, 2010: 4) can be vanished for the case of this study.

As Willis and Willis in Oxford (2008: 113) proposed, a particular grammar construction can be exposed to the students in the pre-task phase. That happened in some of the meetings observed. In the second meeting pre-task phase, the teacher showed the example of an application letter. Some of the students used some constructions from the example in completing their task. In the pre-task phase of the third meeting, the teacher played a video of people doing the task. Some of the students imitated the dialogue in the video to accomplish the task.

In the fifth meeting, there was an activity of recalling the language constructions used in a discussion. But, the students did not use those constructions in the discussion task. They used simple language they had. These phenomena show that the grammar constructions primed in the pre-task phase may be used by the students in performing the task or not.

From the result of the observation, we can see that there was also grammar focus in the task phase of some of the meetings. Lochana and Deb (2006: 144) indeed state that the planning of the report in the task phase promotes attention to grammar. That happened in the third meeting in which the students kept on asking the teacher in planning the report. In planning sub-phase of the fourth meeting, some of the students asked for the teacher's advice before reporting their experience in the task cycle.

Through the observation, it is also proven that TBLT gives an opportunity for the students to learn grammar after focusing on communication mainly in the post-task phase. Grammar focus of the post-task phase in this study seems to contribute a lot to the students' grammar competence. It consisted of grammar learning activity that would indirectly help the students to improve their grammar.

Grammar focus in the post-task phase may also provide teacher's additional explanation of the grammar point reviewed and language practice. These are traditional ways to pay attention on grammar but seemed work well in some of the meetings. It is reasonable to say that such techniques may also help to improve the students' grammar competence.

At the end of the first meeting, the teacher explained the grammar point and led the students to practice the correct language. Similarly, at the end of the third meeting, the teacher gave explanation about the grammar appeared in the task. In the fourth meeting, the teacher explained the ideal construction that can be used by the students in such task employed. While in the seventh meeting, the teacher selected language areas to be practiced by the students.

Thus, for the case of this study, the statement by Ellis (2008: 7) that TBLT can balance 'focus on form' and 'focus on meaning' does not really prevail. The task completion in the task phase might dominate the whole process of TBLT. In turn, the portion of grammar focus in TBLT might be brought down and the students do not obtain grammar lesson that related to the task.

Then, the result of the observation also confirms the explanation by Willis (1996: 43). It is said that language form reviewed in the post-task may include language forms the students were using, problems that the students had, and perhaps forms that need to be covered more or were not used enough.

In the first, the grammar points reviewed were taken from the students' mistakes in the performing the task. In the second and the third meeting, the grammar constructions brought into the review were the ones appeared in the completion of the task. In the fourth meeting, the ideal language form for the task that the students need to know was explained by the teacher.

Furthermore, as it has been said before, the grammar focus in TBLT is a remedial grammar. In tertiary level, the students actually have sufficient grammar knowledge that just needs to be refreshed. Such refreshment is realized in the form of grammar review of TBLT as observed in this study. In turn it could improve the students' grammar competence from their current level.

It is highly related with the statement by Larsen-Freeman (2000: 144). Larsen-Freeman emphasis that in TBLT, by interacting with others, the students get to listen to language which may be beyond their present ability, but with may be assimilated into their knowledge of the target language for use at a later time. The term 'later time' can be interpreted as the post-task phase in which students may reproduce the language and, for sure, as the real-life time.

The students did make several grammatical mistakes in the task phase. Their mistakes are mostly common mistakes made by Indonesian in speaking English. Luckily, some of them soon realized and could correct their grammatical mistakes in the post-task at the time they were asked to do so. This observable fact happened in the some of the meeting i.e. in the

first meeting. It seemed that the students need specific activity to improve their grammar while having their communication activity. TBLT facilitates such activity.

2. The Contribution of TBLT to Stimulate the Students' Interest in Reviewing Grammar

Referring to the finding of the questionnaires, there is a different between the result of the first questionnaire and the second questionnaire. For the first questionnaire, the students give more negative response (44%) toward the positive statements of grammar. That means the students have low interest to focus on grammar in studying English.

The result of the second questionnaire confirms that the positive response (61.5%) to the statements of grammar given by the students is bigger than the negative response (21.0%). The data prove that after having TBLT the students have high interest toward grammar and learning grammar. This result is extremely different from the students' interest concluded in the first questionnaire.

From the mean score of result of the first and the second questionnaire, it can be seen clearly that there is an enhancement of the students' interest toward grammar. That enhancement is happen after the application of TBLT. For that reason, the second hypothesis that TBLT stimulates the students' interest in reviewing grammar can be accepted. The students have changed their attitude toward grammar or learning grammar after having TBLT.

This is highly related to one of the principles of TBLT by Ellis (2008: 6) quoted in the theoretical background. The principle that the students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation in TBLT is confirmed in this study. The intrinsic motivation develop by the students in this study includes the motivation and interest to review grammar.

The development or the stimulation of the students' interest is also influenced by the students' knowledge about grammar and its importance. The percentage of students' choice for undecided option is high in the first questionnaire and becomes lower in the second questionnaire. It means the students have got some idea about grammar and its importance from TBLT that diminish their undecided choice.

From the observation we can see that the task employed in every meeting was related to the students' needs as nurse. The tasks such as describing medical instruments, receiving patients' call, questioning patients' identity and complaint, and filling out medical record form are the tasks that have high possibility to happen in their future work. The tasks are worth for them. Logically, the language or the grammar construction used to perform the task is also worth for their future communication needs.

In previous section, it has been stated that, as observed, the grammar focus activity in the TBLT was different from one meeting to another meeting. The treatment of TBLT in this study did not offer the students with one monotonous grammar learning activity. The grammar point reviewed in that various grammar focuses was also special from the completion of the task in every meeting. Again, that diminished the students' boredom to review grammar.

To end this discussion section, several weaknesses of this research are disclosed to avoid bias judgments in this thesis. First, the length of time in which the treatment of TBLT conducted was too short (seven meetings only). That is the main weakness of this study. Second, this study lacked of deep observation. This study only provided the general observation of classroom activity and interaction related to grammar. There was no students' progress or achievement observation. As well, there was no video record of the treatment.

Although the teacher had tried to strictly follow the framework in applying TBLT in the class, couples of stages or phases of TBLT were not accomplished well. In some of the meetings, there was no planning sub-phase, the grammar review activity was not finished, the time was over before the all procedure of TBLT completed, some of the students did not get involved in the grammar focus activity, and even, some of them did not perform the task

as what instructed. The teacher seemed work hard for those all difficulties. Then, it can be also said the application of TBLT in this study was not really effective in some points.

CONCLUSION

1. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) may improve the students' grammar competence in the way that it allows attention to grammar through focus on form at some stages of TBLT and facilitates remedial grammar activity. This statement is supported by the result of the tests. There is a difference of the students' grammar score from the pre-test to the post-test after the application of TBLT.
2. Task-Based Language Teaching may also stimulate the students' interest in reviewing grammar. TBLT can develop the students' intrinsic motivation to review grammar and awareness of the grammar importance. It is supported by the result of the questionnaires. In the first questionnaire, before having TBLT, the students give more negative responses to grammar and grammar learning. Conveniently, in the second questionnaire, after having TBLT, the students give more positive responses to grammar and its learning.

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